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THE SCHOOL AND THE HOME¹

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There seem to be manifold and sufficient reasons for establishing sympathetic and effective relations between the school and home; and yet, when one undertakes to express these reasons, and to define these relations, the subject is found to be somewhat elusive and baffling.

It is clear, however, that the teacher very much needs the stimulus and the enlightenment that come from a comprehensive knowledge of the home-life of his pupils. It is evident also that the teacher's restricted life and petty cares tend to narrow his vision and to inhibit his imagination. His attention is so focused upon the details of discipline and teaching that he often fails to grasp the larger life of the community in which he lives and which the school is organized to serve. This concentration of interest and attention sometimes becomes so absorbing and so protracted that he actually loses the true vision of education and comes to believe that the acquisition of knowledge is the real purpose of the school. This misconception of the true end of education is the more readily acquired and entertained because the teacher's time and effort are so completely devoted to teaching the subjects of the curriculum and because he fails to discern the relation of this teaching to the subsequent life of the child. In fact it is difficult for anyone to see how some of the stuff that is taught in the school, and in the college as well, has any vital relation to clear thinking or right living. When education breaks down in this way, it merely illustrates a common failing of men to confound the means with the end.

The escape of the teacher from this obsession must come, if at all, from a careful study of the life of the community, from a free mingling with the people, from a sympathetic con-

¹ Read before the Harvard Teachers' Association, March 7, 1908.

tact with parents and homes, from a due appreciation of the conditions under which school children are reared, and from a broader conception of the training needed to prepare such children for the life before them. That the need of this is most urgent in those districts of great cities where poverty and ignorance abound will go without saying; but even in the smaller cities and villages the usefulness of the schools may be enhanced, if the teacher will cultivate the acquaintance of parents and strive to enlist their support and co-operation. The school cannot wisely or safely ignore its obligations to render a larger service to the community than that which comes from controlling the child's behavior and teaching him the subjects of the curriculum important as these may be. In fact, no scheme of public education can be genuinely democratic which does not recognize the conditions and obligations of community life and does not undertake to prepare its pupils to enter upon that life with an appreciative sense of its significance.

It should never be forgotten that the educative process depends quite as much upon the teacher's personality and point of view as upon the subjects of study. As the student emerges from the school and takes up the duties of life, he more and more loses his hold upon the facts of geography, history, language, mathematics, and science which have been taught him with so much solicitude; but the intellectual training which he gets from study, and the ideals of character and conduct, the outlook upon life—its duties and opportunities—which he gets from the teacher, are permanent acquisitions which may contribute more toward his ultimate success and serviceableness than any knowledge he has obtained from his school-books. It is often said that the college student derives more benefit from his college classmates than from his college studies. By a parity of reasoning it may be said that the personal contact of the child with a cultured, broadminded and socially responsive teacher, has greater educative value than that which comes from the knowledge imparted by the school. "The great object of all education," says ex-Commissioner Harris, "is to fit the individual to combine with his fellow-men. His intellectual training should

enable him to master the arts of intercommunication and give him the conventional view of the world. Each individual must be taught how his fellow-citizens look at things and events, or else he cannot understand their actions nor direct his own to any good purpose." The teacher obviously cannot impart what he does not possess. If his vision and sympathies are restricted to the walls of his schoolroom his pupils fail to get from him the point of view and the inspiration that will impel them to render efficient service to the family and the community.

We are gradually changing and enlarging our conception of the function of public education and with it must come a corresponding change in the view-point and function of the teacher. There is no mistaking the fact that in our large centers of population the school has come to be our chief reliance for welding together our racially mixed population and for promoting ideas of civic duty and social development. Deplore it as we may, the church no longer occupies the place of commanding influence which it once held, and, under our changed industrial conditions, the influence of the home, as an educative agency, has been seriously impaired. That men are looking to the school more and more to supplement the church and home in the training of children is evident when we compare the present range of studies with that of former generations, and when we witness the increasing demand for training in the manual arts and for school instruction suited to the needs of boys intending to go into the trades and into business. This attitude of the public mind may be interpreted to mean that teachers—especially those in secondary schools—have focused their interest and attention too much upon such of their students as aspire to a liberal education and too little upon those who must be relied upon to promote the nation's mechanical, industrial, and commercial activities. A recent report from twenty-five cities in the state of New York discloses the ominous fact that only approximately 40 per cent. of all the children complete the curriculum of the elementary school, and the report of the United States Commissioner of Education shows that in 1905 only 13 per cent. of all students in the public high

schools of the country are in the senior year. In the state of New York the corresponding percentage is even less, amounting to only 9.8; and, worse yet, only two-fifths of these are boys. In other words, although 87,654 students were registered last year in the public high school of the state of New York, the number of boys graduated was only 2,424. What further evidence is needed to demonstrate the lack of adaptation of our schools to the actual needs of our population?

It is obvious that those pupils who leave the high school without graduating usually belong to the wage-earning class and it is equally obvious that their right to a secondary education at public expense adapted to their needs is quite as good as that of more fortunate or more ambitious boys who go on to the college or professional school.

If I am right in my belief that our scheme of secondary education is radically defective and that it ought to be readjusted so as to provide for students who are to be wage-earners quite as well as for those who seek a liberal education, then there should be corresponding changes in the ideals and training of school officials and teachers. Only as the teachers enlarge their vision of education can they co-operate in the effort that is making to adapt the activities and teaching of the school to the actual needs of our children and our industries. It is obvious, therefore, that the teacher, quite as much as the parent, needs the illumination and the impulse that grow out of cordial relations between the school and home.

It is one thing, however, to recognize the need of such co-operation between teacher and parent; it is quite another thing to establish it. It is a task of no small difficulty to remove the barrier that is set up between the home and the school, since the school rests upon a legal foundation and under the laws of the state is an independent entity. The classroom teacher has little time and less energy for social intercourse and sociological studies. The burdens which he bears from day to day are well-nigh crushing. No labor is more exhausting than sympathetic and effective teaching. If the task of the teacher were limited to the school-day, if there were no perplexing problems

of discipline to be solved, no written exercises to be pondered and rated, no records to be kept, no criticisms of the principal, superintendent, or parent to be feared, no final examinations impending, no careful preparation to be made for the next day's lessons, and no need to guard the health by daily exercise in the open air, then we might expect the teacher in the public school to study the home life of his pupils, to participate broadly in the social life of the community, and to see the need of a closer relation between the business of the school and the business of life. But as it is, although teachers may *participate* in a movement to socialize the school they cannot be expected to *inaugurate* it. It may be true, as J. J. Findlay says, that "sociology is going to lay hold of the school and in course of time will transform the teacher's ideals and his machinery also," but no one need expect to find such expert sociologists very close to the public schools, but rather in collegiate and professional schools whose business it is to define the ends of education and to train teachers to accomplish them.

I cannot escape the conviction that the obligation to institute reforms in public education and to adjust it to our rapidly changing industrial and social conditions rests primarily upon our colleges and universities. They have the means of knowledge and ought to have the broad and true vision and the active sympathy which compels co-operation to better the public schools. They are directly interested in good schools for the obvious reason that they depend upon the schools for their students. They are under obligations to the schools for the larger reason that it is their normal function to create the ideals and to set up the standards of education in the state for whose service they have been chartered and endowed. It cannot be amiss to say that it is the privilege and the duty of the university to establish such programmes of study as shall give their students who intend to become teachers not only a just and comprehensive view of the actual condition and needs of our heterogeneous population, but also of the educative means and processes by which the school may be better adapted to promote the physical, intellectual, and moral vigor of the children and so to

transform them into successful bread-winners and good citizens. It is gratifying to note that the colleges and universities in the state of New York are responding to this call of duty and that the great universities of Columbia and Syracuse have established teachers' colleges, and that twelve other colleges maintain departments for the training of teachers.

There are several reasons why the parent should take an active interest in the school. It is his right and his duty to oversee the school that educates his children. It is his right because he pays the price of it and because it is his natural prerogative to know that his child is receiving the attention in the school that he needs. It is his duty because, where parental oversight and criticism are wanting, teachers, like other fallible mortals following the lines of least resistance, sometimes become neglectful of their duty, unreasonable in their requirements, and arrogant in their bearing toward their pupils. Even the best teachers and principals are more circumspect in their official conduct and more careful in teaching when under the critical eye of intelligent and watchful parents. However conscientious we may be in our management, however strong may be our grasp upon the principles of education and methods of teaching, we must all admit that our vision has been clarified, our sanity developed and our judgment matured both by the suggestive criticisms and by the angry complaints of interested parents. An open-minded principal may often get much needed and valuable information about his own school if he will give to parents that have a grievance a cordial welcome to his office.

For more than a dozen years I followed the practice of setting apart an hour or more on a specified day of every week for private conferences in my office with parents who might desire to consult me about the school life of their children. As an outcome of these conferences, which increased in number and length from year to year, perplexing cases of discipline were amicably settled, misunderstandings were cleared up, elective studies were adapted to the proposed destination of students, and, best of all, the school thereby obtained a stronger hold upon the community's confidence and co-operation. No other

means that I have ever adopted in the administration of a school has been more educative to me or more productive of good results to the school. Not all of these interviews, of course, were harmonious, but even the stormy ones, in which an occasional threat was made or a bribe offered, were instructive if not edifying.

Although the public school is a state institution and is operated under state laws, its well-being and well-doing are so dependent upon the community which it serves, that I have often thought that its efficiency is directly proportional to the interest and oversight manifested by the parents. The reflex effect of this critical attitude upon the parents themselves, and through them upon their children, permeates the school, makes the pupils more alert and the teachers more faithful and proficient. To be sure these self-appointed critics of the schools are sometimes over-zealous and even meddlesome, but this excess of zeal is much more wholesome than the indifference and neglect that characterize many communities which in consequence have poor schools. It is much easier to teach and to manage a school located in a great city where the delinquent teacher is not readily reached by an offended parent, but such immunity is not conducive to good teaching or good schools.

The ideas of parents and teachers must converge if the administration of the public schools in any locality is to reach a good degree of perfection. To this end the leading spirits of a school or set of schools should undertake to quicken the imagination of the community and thereby to enlist its co-operation in obtaining needed equipment and an efficient corps of teachers. Under our system of schools, or lack of system, administrative efficiency is well-nigh impossible when the details of school management are left entirely to the unguided direction of the local board of education. If school officials were educational experts and if we had an adequate supply of accomplished superintendents and of mature and well-trained teachers the need of parental co-operation would be much less imperative. But there is no mistaking the fact that even in favored communities the number of young, inexperienced, and incompetent teachers

is very large, and, under present economic conditions, constantly growing larger. And no one would be rash enough to say that the average principal or superintendent of schools is built on such a large plan as to qualify him for unquestioned leadership. Under such conditions an informed public sentiment relating to schools has great significance. It debars school officials from appointing teachers through political or social influence which is a great and wide-spread evil; it detects and exposes inefficiency of instruction and management, brings about the dismissal of the incompetent, compels adequate appropriation, prevents the overcrowding of classes, improves sanitary conditions, decorates schoolrooms, and sometimes provides playgrounds.

If it appears to some that such co-operation is possible only in exceptionally intelligent communities and that such directive power over the schools can be safely intrusted only to experts, it may be said in rejoinder that the only solid backing for good schools in this country is an insistent public demand for them, that while the teacher is trained in the traditional theories of education, the parent is trained in the logic of life, that the parent's interest in his child's education transcends that of the teacher, and that education goes on apace when the parent expresses his sympathy and respect for the work of the teacher.

The principal of the school has in his own hands the most simple and direct means of bringing the school and home into mutually helpful relations. He should have capacity for genuine friendships and should seek thereby so to command the acquaintance and confidence of the community that visits of parents to the school may be made freely and frequently. Such visits are facilitated by invitations to inspect the classroom work on designated days, to be present at public exercises in the school gymnasium, to attend informal lantern-slide lectures given by a teacher upon some interesting phase of school instruction, to witness school debates, literary exercises, and graduation ceremonies in which the speakers should be students of the school.

Exhibits of school-work yield unbounded delight to children

and no less pleasure to parents. They often unlock the door that bars the parent from entrance into his child's school-life which is so unlike that of the home and so apart from it that the child otherwise fails to get the parental encouragement and sympathetic guidance which at times he sorely needs. During one afternoon and evening not long ago, no less than two thousand people visited a biologic exhibit made by one of the high schools in New York City. The products of the work done by the students were set up in the various classrooms and laboratories, members of the classes were present to act as guides and to explain the exhibit, and visitors were able to see experiments in actual operation, plants growing under a variety of conditions, dissections, magnified cross-sections revealing structure, tests for starch and sugar in foods, cultures, fermentations, distillations, yeast plants, and bacteria under the compound microscope, etc., etc. The good results accruing from this exhibit may be easily imagined. They were far-reaching and outweighed all its cost in time and effort.

But the most effective and permanent means of promoting close relationship and sympathy between the school and home are, doubtless, voluntary associations of parents which provide for an inductive study of local conditions and for concerted action. These associations in the congested districts of our large cities are multiplying rapidly and seem to be the outgrowth of an educational impulse not only to assist the work of the school but to supplement it by manifesting an active interest in the children that come from homes of ignorance and poverty. Such organizations are doing a unique work in developing among parents a feeling of responsibility to co-operate with the school in the education of their children and especially in disclosing the shortcomings of the school. These shortcomings are often due to causes over which the teachers of the school have little or no control. They issue from ignorance of our laws and language, from defective nutrition, from physical disabilities that affect the vision or hearing from truancy, from the erratic or depraved influence of the "gang," and from the thousand and one limitations that are faced by the very poor

and hard-working people who live in the congested tenement districts of our large cities. Many of these evils extend to the smaller cities and even to the villages. For example, the New York State Board of Health has recently discovered that out of 89,640 school children in 390 villages, 43,658 have defective vision, 10,126 have inflamed or scaly eyelids, 5,727 have defective hearing and 10,831 are mouth breathers. If such conditions obtain in the comparatively homogeneous communities of villages, what must they be in the more physically degenerate population of large cities? No doubt some of these barriers to education may be lowered by the legalized action of school officials but they may not be removed without such an enlightened and organized public opinion as may be developed by voluntary associations of interested parents. Some teachers and school officials seem to be apprehensive lest these organizations may assume an unwarranted and meddlesome control over the organization and work of the school, but this is hardly to be feared for the reason that co-operation is their avowed purpose and because the public opinion of a community will not justify a local association in a direct and radical interference with the established procedure of a public school.

Associations of parents have already demonstrated their serviceableness within the field of school education. What they may do hereafter to weld together our heterogeneous population, to carry help and healing to the homes of the poor and unfortunate, and to make the school plant accessible for evening instruction to parents in the domestic arts and for social and literary entertainment to children and their parents are questions that must be answered in the light of experiment and experience. That great good is in the way of accomplishment there can be no doubt.